Screening Job Applications Webinar

Moderator/Joan: Welcome to the Virtual Training Center. This is Joan Strohauer with Statewide Learning and Performance Management. Our presentation today is Screening Job Applications: Making The Best Job-Person Match. Our presenter is Cathy Spencer. Cathy currently works for the Human Resources Modernization Project as the Personnel Program Advisor with the Classification and Compensation team. She has 23 years of experience in Human Resources working in five different departments. Prior to working at HR Moderator, Cathy managed the Employee and Management Services, Position Control and Personnel Transaction sections in the Human Resources Division at the Board of Equalization. So, welcome Cathy.

Presenter/Cathy: Thank you Joan. Hi everybody, and welcome to our webinar on Screening Job Applications: Making The Best Job Person Match. At the end of this meeting you will have a basic understanding of how the merit principle applies to the job application screening process; how to establish appropriate screening criteria; and, how to screen job applications.

Keep in mind, your ultimate goal is to make good job/person matches while upholding the merit principle.

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This webinar is designed to provide an overview of a job application screening process and tips on how to make recruiting to fill vacancies more manageable. You should always refer you back to your human resources office at your department for answers to your questions or for more specific advice and consultation.

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Now a little bit of background--for a while it was hard to recruit for state jobs and exam lists had small numbers of candidates. Supervisors may have had to advertise multiple times to generate even a small group of candidates. Some of the lists were old; some didn't even existent, so departments were having to go search out lists from other departments and get authorization to use the list. Because a lot of exams have been given on a department promotional basis, the lists have tended to be much smaller than those from an open list in which the applicant pool can be much larger. Remember that anyone meeting the minimum qualifications can take an open examination; however, you have to be a state employee to take promotional exams.

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In 2008, the State Personnel Board approved a pilot that allowed multiple departments to join together to give open, on-line exams and to use only 3 passing scores. These exams are available for candidates to take 24/7.

So, I'm curious now, I want to take a little poll here and find out how many of you have heard about the Three Rank Eligible List Pilot?

POLL --- HAS ANYONE USED A LIST FROM THE THREE RANK ELIGIBLE PILOT?

Okay, it looks like about 75% of you have heard of the pilot. That's a good thing. Now, I'm curious, has anybody used the list from the Three Rank Eligible Pilot? And it's okay if you don't know where your certification list came from, because that happens. A lot of people don't know.

So, the state has also at the same time increased the use of qualifications' assessment exams. These are exams in which applicants self certify if they meet the minimum qualifications for the classification and are typically education and experience types of exams. These exams are available on-line, 24 hours a day. So you can see, you may now have many more candidates than you were used to seeing.

If fact, within weeks of posting the first exams, there were over 1,000 people on one of the lists. So, the state went from having many small lists at multiple departments with few people reachable, to having centralized larger lists with a large number of candidates eligible for appointment.

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A Three Rank Eligible List is one in which all applicants who meet the minimum qualifications for a classification and pass the exam are placed into one of three ranks. Applicants who do not pass the examination will always be assigned a score of 65 and will not be ranked or appear on the eligible list. After allowing for veterans preference and other required adjustments, the resulting list will permit departments to consider a broader pool of eligible candidates than have generally been available for consideration in the past. Departments will then continue the competitive assessment of candidates by further evaluating their qualifications, fitness, and relative strengths during the hiring process and probationary periods.

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So, if you are able to recruit to fill a vacancy and use a classification with a Three Rank Eligible List, you might notice the pool of candidates available for interview has grown exponentially since the last time you recruited.

Starting with good screening criteria allows you to sort through the applications you receive and interview only those applicants who meet your job related criteria. This will not only help you find the best person for your job vacancy, but it will prevent you from having to interview anybody who happens to toss an application your way.

What is job related? The official definition of job related is that it is a standard that is met when the KSABs, which are knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviors, assessed in a selection procedure are demonstrated through an analysis of the job to be necessary for successful job performance. In other words, you can't just make it up. They have to somehow tie back to your job.

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So, first things first … It is absolutely critical to remember that in California State service, the California State Constitution establishes that all appointments and promotions must be made based strictly on the employee's ability to do the job, meaning on that person's "merit". This is referred to as the "merit principle. What that means is that <u>all</u> of your screening criteria must be strictly job related. At the end of the day you need to be able to explain thoroughly why you decided this person was the right one, and to do so in terms that stress an objective evaluation using pre-set criteria that were fairly applied. So, in other words, you assess the job-related qualifications using pre-set criteria that everybody was measured against in a fair way.

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Managers often ask "Where do I start?" Once you have a vacancy, start by looking at the work you need done and compare it with the knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviors of your current staff.

You'll want to look and see if there are gaps in the knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviors you need to get the work done and what your current staff has.

- Are you aware of new work coming into your unit that requires other abilities that your current staff do not have?

- Are there gaps in the KSABs you need to get the work done and what your current staff has?
- Will there be new workload assigned to your unit that you need to consider?
- Will the new work change the KSABs required to be successful?
- Is old work going away?
- Are there new changes coming up in your business environment – for example, new laws, new regulations, new technology that you'll be using?

Once you know that information, it is time to review the job description.

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You want to make sure the job description is up-to-date and reflects duties that will be performed and the knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviors required of the incumbent to be successful. So, when you look at it you're looking for…

Are the duties identified appropriate for the classification?

Is the classification title correct?

Do the percentages of time spent with each activity add up to 100%?

Are the percentages that are identified accurate?

Further, does your job description identify the essential and non-essential functions in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and California's Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA).

If you need help, staff in your Human Resources Office can help you.

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So, we know that people consider more than salary when they are looking for jobs. You can help them by identifying the working condition on the job description. Identifying the working conditions helps candidates screen jobs. Remember, it is a two way process. In as much as you are screening candidates – candidates screen supervisors, jobs and departments. So, be sure to put the information on the working conditions in your job announcement and let applicants self-screen. You want to give applicants sufficient information for them to decide if this is a job they even want to apply for. So what are working Conditions?

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Some examples of working conditions might be – working in a downtown location (or not); free parking; traveling 50% of the time;

working in a high-rise building; no overtime or lots of overtime. Some people don’t want to work downtown, others can’t or don’t want to travel. There should be a place on your job description where you can describe the conditions under which they will work. Give people information about some of the things that may really matter to them. The more applicants self screen, the less you have to screen and further when you interview you are probably talking to people who have a reasonable idea of the job and its working conditions. In fact, I know several instances of employees who have accepted jobs at correctional facilities and then they are surprised that they work with inmates and want to return to the department they just left. So, working conditions are pretty important to identify on job descriptions.

Are there any questions at this point?

Moderator/Joan: Yes, Cathy, we do have a question. One is-- should I include physical requirements on the job bulletin?

Presenter/Cathy: You know, that’s a great question because physical requirements are like working conditions. There are the things that you have to do, for example, you may have to transport material that weighs 50 pounds over uneven terrain or something. You want to put that on your job descriptions and your job announcements, because that is something else that will help people self-screen. That's a great question.

Moderator/Joan: And one more-- where do you get a list of the flags on the certs?

Presenter/Cathy: Oh, one of the things that the new certifications have are called preference flags. And preferences are identified by the candidates when they take the exam. What they are, for example, on the staff counsel, the attorneys and the preferences were body of law. So, did you want to be in employment law? Do you want to be in contract law? Do you want to be transportation or social services kind of law? So, candidates identify their preference and then when you order a certification, the names of people with only those preferences appear on the list. So, it's another mechanism to screen a potentially huge candidate pool down to people who are really interested in a job. Okay, so we're ready to go on.

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What are screening criteria?

Screening criteria are the jo- related factors you are measuring candidates against to determine who is most qualified for the job. Having a lot of candidates without the proper screening tools can present as many problems as not having enough qualified candidates. Screening criteria can be easy to develop once you know what you are looking for. Screening criteria should be developed before you ever see an application to avoid the appearance that people were screened in or out based on what you saw on the applications.

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The very first screening criteria to use is eligibility to appoint. It's the easiest. That is -- how will you appoint them? Are they going to transfer into the position from their current position, will they have to come off of a certification list, will they reinstate into the classification?   Include in the job announcement that candidates must identify their eligibility for appointment on their application. You will still have to verify that eligibility, but at least you won't have to guess how they are eligible! And further, if they don't follow those directions, they can be screened out.

So now you are beginning to create a list of screening criteria.

If they can be appointed, the next criteria are going to be based on the operational needs of your work group.

- Do you need to have someone who is currently doing the same job as the one for which you are advertising or…
- Can you have somebody who recently had the same job?
- You may be able to have somebody who has done similar jobs to the one for which you are advertising or…
- Has had a job requiring the same types of knowledge, skill, abilities and behaviors as the one that you are advertising.

- And then, of course, you want to know if they have the required education and technical skills. And if you're looking for new staff, you have staff that can train them.

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It can be pretty easy to determine the technical skills required – Your candidates may have to know chemistry, or be an engineer, or be able to write and/or review grants, things like that. Those are also some of the easiest to identify – e.g., I have been an engineer for 15 years; I have written and reviewed grants for 10 years; I have a chemistry degree and worked in a lab for 5 years. But there is more than technical skills that make employees successful

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You'll want to spend time on your job announcement. Remember, this is your introduction to the people you are trying to attract. And keep in mind also as we stated before, in as much as you are looking for applicants, applicants are looking for good jobs and managers. So, when you look at your job announcement, you want it to describe the job duties, working conditions and any requirements for supplemental information. You want to be sure and give people sufficient information for them to self-screen.

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There are also soft skills that you can identify that may help you reach the goal of the right person for the right job and get you a good job-person match. Most state civil service jobs require the ability to follow directions, present neat, concise and complete work to be successful. Include a statement in your job announcement that applications and resumes will be screened to ensure all requested information is included and the application and resume are complete, clear and understandable. Then when the applications start coming in you will be able to see if they followed directions and comply with the requirement that their applications be neat, complete, and concise.

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Some of these skills are known as "soft skills" – and they matter on the job. Soft skills are job related attributes people bring to the job in addition to the technical KSABs. They are things like flexibility, good judgment, self-motivation, leadership, honesty, integrity, ability to manage time. One way to find out about these types of skills is by using a tool called a Supplemental Questionnaire.
Your staff in your HR Shop may be able to help you describe the job-related soft skills you are looking for.

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Now, if you want to know who is really serious about applying for your job ask candidates to submit additional, job related information with their application. This may take the form of a *supplemental questionnaire* that you require be submitted with the candidates application and resume. And I recommend that you have them submit it with their application and resume so that you don't add time onto an already somewhat long process.

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A supplemental questionnaire is made up of additional job-related questions that give potential candidates the opportunity to tell you about specific experiences that demonstrate how they have previously applied the knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviors (KSABs) needed for your vacancy. To get at the specific information you are looking for these additional questions should be behavior based – This means asking applicants to tell you about a time when they did, saw, acted-- however it was that you were asking them to act.

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Because these questions are based on a candidate's own experience, they do not have to be confidential. You are asking them for their own experience and not generic information that somebody else can provide for them. Basically, they can't cheat if you are asking about their own experience. However, in addition to asking the candidates to provide the specific information you're looking for, you can also ask that they provide the contact information of somebody who has knowledge of what they are describing and can provide a reference for the experience they identified. Additional information on behavior based questions can be found in the Help Desk for Managers and Supervisors.

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Here are a couple of sample behavior-based interview questions. Again, there is a module on behavior-based questions on HR Mod Web Page and in the Virtual Help Desk for managers and supervisors. So, you can find some additional information there. And you can see by these questions that you're asking applicants to provide you with really specific information about a distinct thing that they did.

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Now, include the requirement to submit the Supplemental Questionnaire in your job announcements. And this is going to shorten your recruitment time if you do this. If you wait until you get applications in and then send out a supplemental questionnaire, that's going to extend the time that you have a vacant position. So, you want to have the applicants submit their supplemental questionnaire with their applications and resumes. And again, you want to include a place for the applicants to identify somebody who has knowledge of that.

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Supplemental questionnaires require applicants to submit additional information. This information can be about anything that is job related. The Virtual Help Desk for Managers and Supervisors has two samples: the first one uses Survey Monkey, which is software that's used for surveying people and the good thing about the Survey Monkey is you can review their information on a flow basis. And it's just out there. They submit it electronically to you. A second example in the supervisor's help desk includes questions that the applicants must submit with their application. This was a CDCR supplemental questionnaire and they just had pages with a question on the top and the reference on the bottom and the applicants completed the information that they were required to complete on the page and then submit it with application. So, not only do supplemental questionnaires give you a mechanism to screen interested candidates, but it also allows potential candidates to screen themselves out without wasting your valuable time – candidates who do not complete the supplemental questionnaire will not be eligible to be interviewed. So, no complete; no compete. Depending on the information you ask for, you may be provided also with a sample of their work styles when candidates respond to your questions.

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This slide gives you specific information and links on how to find the database question samples that I've referenced.

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In addition to asking the candidates to respond to the questions I think it is equally as important to request that they provide contact information of a boss who has knowledge of what they are describing and can provide a reference. So, while you want to trust, you also want to verify.

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So, if the most important factor for success in your job or in the job for which you're advertising is doing a similar job with similar prior experience, one approach is to use a hierarchy of experience when you review applications. For example, you can identify a hierarchy of experience –

- ✓ Does the applicant have the same job now as the one that you're advertising?
- ✓ Have they done the same job recently?
- ✓ Have they done a similar job or a job that would provide similar experience to what you're advertising? And again, you might want to use this if that is really what you need to be successful or if you really don't have anybody to train anybody new and you need to get this work done pretty quickly.

Are there any questions on what we've covered so far?

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What do you look for?

What is most important in the job announcement? Did your applicant follow the directions you identified in the job announcement?

Was their application neat, concise, and thorough? Remember this is the time of the relationship when they should be trying to dazzle you and stand out from their competition for this job.

Do they meet the technical requirements for your job?

What is the quality of their supplemental questionnaire – can they write?

What is the quality of their job-related experiences they identified on their supplemental questionnaire?

So, you'll want to go through all of those things and start rating your apps.

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You need to come up with a way to keep track of the information you are asking for and receiving. I use a chart like the one in this slide because it's easy, it's simple and it gets me there. When I go through the applications I begin sorting them into piles:

Application is neat, concise and all information requested has been submitted – Or NOT-- that would go into a different pile.

Applicant possesses the required education, certifications, licenses, etc.

I might want to apply a hierarchy of experience if that is what you are using and there's an operational need in your unit to use that. So, the applicant is performing the same work may get greater consideration because their experience is current and they can come in and do the job with minimal training.

Applicant has recently performed same work –

Applicant has performed similar work –

Applicant has experience of a nature that is similar to what you are looking for.

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So, we're almost finish here. Before we conclude, does anyone have any questions?

Moderator/Joan: Yes, there are two questions Cathy. First of all, what should be included in the official release to look at the official personnel files?

Presenter/Cathy: The release to look at official personnel files or OPF. The release should include, in my opinion, the ability to get a copy of the State Controller's Office employment history for your applicants. And what this has is it shows you their employment history and you can compare this to their application. And it's just a way to verify their experience and it also gets you the history. Now, I've heard of instances where some departments don't provide that. If that's the case with one of your applicants, they have to provide it to the applicant themselves. So, you can get it through the applicant.

Moderator/Joan: And we have a second question. How long do you keep your documents?

Presenter/Cathy: Well, document retention is, there's usually a record of retention schedule someplace in your department that may identify it. If it's not identified, I tend to keep my applications or the applications, my recruitment packages, I'll call them that, because they have everything in them, until I leave the department. I don't know if that's necessary, but that's my comfort level.

Any other questions?

Moderator/Joan: We don't have any more.

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Okay, so a quick review.

- ✓ Determine and document your screening criteria before you get any applications.
- ✓ Ensure all criteria are job related.

- ✓ Identify what you are looking for in your job announcement. Remember, the idea here is to give applicants sufficient information for them to screen themselves out.
- ✓ Consider using a Supplemental Questionnaire.
- ✓ Treat all applicants the same – if you let some applicants in after your final filing date, you must let others.
- ✓ Keep track of how you are screening the candidates, so if you're ever asked to demonstrate how you got to your final hire, you can.
- ✓ Go forward and interview and DON'T FORGET TO CHECK THOSE REFERENCES!!

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And finally, from George Washington Carver, there is no short cut to achievement. Life requires thorough preparation – veneer isn't worth anything.

You're going to have to work to attract and select good candidates.

Hopefully this webinar has given you some ideas on how best to approach your recruitments in the future.

Thank you all for attending. This webinar is now over.

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